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# **National Intelligence Bulletin**

State Dept. review completed

**Top Secret**

[redacted] 25X1

February 28, 1975

No. 638

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Approved For Release 2007/03/07 : CIA-RDP79T00975A027400010060-1

Approved For Release 2007/03/07 : CIA-RDP79T00975A027400010060-1

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EGYPT-SYRIA

New notes of flexibility sounded by Egyptian President Sadat and Syrian President Asad since Secretary Kissinger's most recent visit to the Middle East attest to the anxiety of both parties to achieve a breakthrough in the next round of negotiations. Although Egypt and Syria do not appear to be coordinating their negotiating stands, both leaders have attempted to paint a picture of moderation for Tel Aviv by making some significant public departures from the stale rhetoric of the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Neither Egypt nor Syria has given a clear public signal that the gap between their specific negotiating proposals and Israel's is narrowing. Nevertheless, in press interviews over the past two weeks, Sadat and Asad have attempted to respond in a positive way on the critical nonbelligerency issue, which has been repeatedly raised by the Israelis.

In an interview with a Washington Post editor this month, Sadat rejected the notion of providing Israel with a written guarantee. He promised, however, that Egypt would not attack Israel so long as negotiations continued and suggested, in effect, that the US could serve as the guarantor of Egypt's peaceful intentions.

Asad, in an interview in the current issue of Newsweek, also called for an end to the state of belligerency as a first step, although he offered no specific proposals. He added that a US defense guarantee for Israel would be acceptable to Syria as part of a final settlement, but not as part of an interim package. By not rejecting out of hand the notion of a defense guarantee, Asad may be indirectly signaling Tel Aviv that he could live with some form of US guarantee for a second-stage Egyptian-Israeli settlement along the line suggested by Sadat to the Post.

In any case, Asad's admission in the Newsweek interview that he would be willing to sign a long-term peace treaty with Israel is the clearest public signal to date of his commitment to the negotiating process. This is the first time Asad has been willing to be as explicit as Sadat, who repeatedly has said that Egypt is ready to sign a peace treaty when the time comes, and to accept the right of Israel to exist.

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By going on record now, Asad may be hoping to elicit a positive Israeli response to Syria's demand that some movement on the Golan be linked with a formula for a second-stage Israeli-Egyptian agreement. Asad indicated that he is not insisting on an immediate return to Geneva, and he clearly left open the possibility that he would be willing to negotiate a second-stage withdrawal on the Golan. He added, however, that a limited Israeli pull-back in the southern Golan--leaving the hills around Qunaytirah in Israeli hands--was of no interest to Syria.

For his part, Sadat gave a further hint in his Post interview that he is prepared to assuage any fears by the Israelis that substantial concessions to the Arabs now will only lead to unacceptable demands in the future. The Egyptian leader risked drawing fire from the Palestinians and Saudi King Faysal by asserting that he is prepared to accept the internationalization of the entire city of Jerusalem as an alternative to the return of the Arab sector to the Arabs. Subsequently, the counselor of the Egyptian embassy to the Vatican told a US official that Sadat's statement is a firm government decision.

By using US media to transmit these signals to Israel, Sadat and Asad may hope to avoid arousing domestic criticism of their departures from orthodoxy, but both must reckon with the reaction of doctrinaire Arab critics, in particular the Palestinians. The clearest acknowledgement of this constraint came on Wednesday, when Asad's press office said the Newsweek interview did not "faithfully express" his comments on a peace treaty with Israel.

A Syrian Foreign Ministry official later told the US ambassador in Damascus that the retraction had been an effort to protect some of Asad's supporters in the Baath Party leadership who were coming up for re-election next week. The official assured the ambassador that Asad's original comments to Newsweek were an accurate reflection of Syria's position, and that this would be made clear at the "proper stage" in negotiations.

Sadat has also come under fire from the Palestinians for his statements on Jerusalem.

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CAMBODIA

Prince Sihanouk claims that North Vietnamese leaders have agreed to step up deliveries of Chinese arms to the insurgents in response to the US airlift to Phnom Penh. In a press interview in Peking yesterday, Sihanouk said that he had worked out the agreement during his visit to Hanoi during the Tet holidays.

In the past, the Prince has maintained that Peking furnishes all the insurgents' arms and munitions and that Hanoi fulfills its responsibilities merely by transporting them south. On Wednesday, both Hanoi and the Viet Cong strongly denounced the expanded airlift, labeling it a violation of the Paris agreement, and threatening "consequences."

Turning to other subjects, Sihanouk said in the interview that anyone who believed that the Khmer Communists would negotiate under present conditions was naive, and that he himself would not stay on as head of state after a Khmer Communist victory. He claimed that the Communists had insisted the post was his for life, but he asserted that the only role he would accept following the cessation of hostilities would be that of a roving emissary. He added that he had sent word of his decision to Khmer Communist leaders.

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Even if he changed his mind and accepted a figure-head position, Sihanouk said, he would spend 11 months of each year abroad. In this regard, Sihanouk stressed his ideological differences with the Khmer Communists and said that he preferred to end his career as a national hero rather than risk being put on trial by the Communists as a traitor sometime in the future.

Sihanouk over the years has alleged that his role in a postwar, Communist-controlled Cambodia would be minimal. He now appears convinced that this will be the case.

Shortly after he returned to Peking from Hanoi in mid-month, Sihanouk told [redacted] that it was increasingly unlikely that he would ever return to Cambodia, and that he was thinking of living in France. Sihanouk said the Chinese would never turn him out, but that he did not wish to embarrass his hosts by staying on when it was clear he was without a future in Cambodian affairs. The Prince left little doubt that his depression stemmed from his trip to Hanoi--and possibly his meeting with Khmer Communist "special envoy" Ieng Sary--but he would say nothing about what had transpired in the North Vietnamese capital.

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The Khmer Communists, for their part, issued a broad policy statement yesterday in the form of a communiqué announcing the completion on Tuesday of a "national congress," an assembly of top representatives from Communist-front organizations which gives pro forma approval for policy formulated by the Khmer Communist Party central committee. Among the important policy statements were:

--a blunt notice that "ringleaders" such as Lon Nol, Long Boret, Sosthene Fernandez, and Sirik Matak "must be killed for their treason";

--assurances that other "top and middle-level" civilian and military officials would be well treated if they stopped cooperating with the "traitors";

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--a call for all foreign embassies in Phnom Penh to evacuate and a Communist refusal to bear responsibility for any "accidents";

--promises of an "independent and nonaligned" foreign policy allowing no "foreign" military bases and accepting all unconditional aid.

The communique made no mention of negotiations--not even the standard rejections. The usual call was made for civilians in the government zone to rebel or to cross over to the insurgent side, where a livelihood was assured under a "classless and prosperous economic and social system."

The congress was chaired by "deputy prime minister and defense minister" Khieu Samphan. The communique claimed it was held under "extremely favorable circumstances," with the Lon Nol government "on the verge of collapse militarily, economically, and politically." It was only the second such gathering of national-level Communist officials since the conflict began. The last was held in July 1973--less than a month prior to the US bombing halt. The timing of the latest congress suggests that the Khmer Communist leadership may be confident of "victory" and is readying the party apparatus for a take-over, or that at the least it wants to convey that impression.

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CHINA-INDIA

Chinese Vice Premier Chen Hsi-lien, who is also a member of the party's ruling Politburo, told the Indian press this week that Peking is prepared to talk to New Delhi about the normalization of relations. Chen refused, however, to predict when relations would be upgraded from the chargé level, where they have been frozen since the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962.

The vice premier made his remarks--the most authoritative indication to date of Peking's desire for improved relations--to newsmen during a brief stop at the Calcutta airport en route home from the coronation of the Nepalese King. The stopover itself seems to be significant. The Chinese probably could have obtained permission to overfly India without stopping in Calcutta, but they apparently wanted to give Chen an opportunity to convey his message.

During the past three weeks the Peking press has halted its steady stream of anti-Indian propaganda, a staple of reporting since last summer. The Chinese press thus far has also soft-pedaled India's new political arrangement in Kashmir by replaying Pakistani Prime Minister Bhutto's protests without comment.

The Indians have been cautious in responding to the Chinese initiatives. The top Indian official sent to receive Chen at the airport was the West Bengal finance minister, although a Calcutta-based representative

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25X1 of the Indian Foreign Ministry was also present. [redacted]

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25X1 [redacted] The Indians, however, have clearly indicated an interest in exploring the possibility of better ties.

The Indians probably would have trouble going much further than this, at least for the time being. The Soviets would certainly take a jaundiced view of any significant improvement in Sino-Indian relations, and this may well have been a factor in the negotiations just concluded between the Indians and Soviet Defense Minister Grechko in New Delhi. India for some time has been pressing the Soviets for better aid terms as well as for certain new types of economic and military assistance.

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USSR

Writing in the naval journal Morskoy Sbornik last December, Soviet navy chief Gorshkov discussed the present and future roles of naval forces, particularly of the Soviet navy.

One of Gorshkov's key assertions is that the navy's strategic role has grown and will continue to do so. Moreover, he advocates greater coordination and integration of naval strategic missions with those of the other Soviet services--especially in connection with operations in ocean theaters.

Despite the official Soviet view that the General Staff provides leadership for all the armed forces, the navy traditionally has maintained a degree of separation or independence; at times the navy has been a separate ministry. The apparent narrowing of this separation probably results not only from the navy's widening strategic role but from the need for a central authority--the General Staff--to exercise strong control over nuclear weapons, once their use has been authorized.

Gorshkov views the increased range of modern weaponry, such as sea-launched ballistic missiles, as the driving force behind the navy's expanded strategic role. "As a result," he asserts, "naval combat activity may embrace almost the entire expanse of the world ocean and take on a global character." Gorshkov has in mind, of course, Y-class submarines, armed with the newer version of the SS-N-6 missiles with a 1,600-mile range, and the new D-class boats with SS-N-8s, which have a range of 4,200 miles. He is also referring to cruise missiles and their employment against major surface ships and submarines.

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The nature and extent of naval activities during the General Staff exercise that is expected to be held this spring should provide further indications of the role of the navy in current Soviet strategic planning.

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The Argentine guerrillas who kidnaped the honorary US consul in Cordoba are threatening to execute him unless the government shows that four leftist prisoners are alive. The guerrillas set a deadline of 6 p.m. today.

Last month, another terrorist group gave President Peron 72 hours to prove that 16 leftist prisoners were well. In that case, the threat was to kill government employees at random. Photographs of some but not all of the prisoners were published, but the terrorists were apparently satisfied. By periodically demanding that the government show prisoners, the terrorists may hope to prevent security forces from killing them.

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Security forces yesterday arrested a physician who may have been on the abduction team; he might be able to locate the "people's prison" where the consul is held. The Montoneros, the guerrilla band responsible for the consul's abduction, are increasingly sensitive to public opinion and may not kill him if the government can show that at least one of the prisoners is alive.

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